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ABSTRACT

A total of 59 Senegalese adult and college students filled out a questionnaire in a study designed to gather data about their reading habits. The 15-item instrument, written in English and French, required yes or no responses to questions that described students' satisfaction with reading ability, types of materials read, perceptions of reading efficiency, and ease and availability of obtaining reading materials. Among the findings were the following: (1) there were no significant differences between married and single students' and between traditional and nontraditional students' reading habits; (2) all groups reported that they would like to read better, that they enjoyed reading, that they read newspapers often, and that, if possible, they would take a course to improve their reading; (3) both married and single groups reported that they enjoyed reading fiction and nonfiction material; (4) all groups reported that they remembered most of what they read within a reasonable time period; and (5) no practical differences exist for either of the groups in ease and availability of obtaining reading materials. (Appended are a brief history and description of Dakar, Senegal, West Africa and the French and English versions of the questionnaire. (HOD)

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A Report on the
Reading Habits of College-Aged
Senegalese Students

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Introduction

According to The World Factbook¹, literacy in Senegal, WEST AFRICA is estimated to be 10% for those 14 years of age and older. Large numbers of Senegalese children enter primary schools each year, but only about three percent ever graduate. Reasons for this small percentage might be due to the instructional language, school curriculum, expatriated faculties, school availability and insufficient finance.

An in-depth look at the factors that influence the educational process of Senegalese students include: (a) Instructional Language. Even though tribal languages are spoken by students when they enter school, the instructional language is French. Wolof, which is spoken to some degree by nearly half of the population and may be the first language acquired, is not built into the instructional program. Therefore, when students enter school they must use approximately 50% of their school time learning to read, write, and speak the French language. (b) School Curriculum. The school curriculum is influenced heavily by the French model (see Appendix A). Their diplomas and degrees are almost identical to those awarded in France. In order for students to pass examinations, and earn diplomas and degrees, they must demonstrate the same level of proficiency in knowledge and linguistic skill as the students who live in France. (c) Expatriated Faculties. Even though concerted efforts are being made to decrease the French influence in schools, Senegal still has a large number of teaching staff at the higher secondary and university levels whose members are expatriates. The expatriates seem

to perpetuate France's system of education. (d) School Availability. It is difficult for some Senegalese children to go to school partly because of where they live in relationship to where schools are located. Many of the secondary schools are located in or near the largest towns, thereby, making it very difficult for rural students to attend. (e) Insufficient Finance. Finances for educating the people of Senegal are limited. Unfortunately, the amount of money that can be used for education has not been enough to support education for the majority of the people.²

Senegal's educational system has: elementary, two secondary, vocational and university levels of study. Students attend the elementary level for five years. That level prepares students for work or for continuation into the first secondary cycle which they may attend only if they pass the elementary proficiency examination. The first secondary cycle is a four year program. At the end of that cycle students take the second proficiency examination. If they pass that examination they may enter the higher secondary cycle which is a three year program, or attend vocational school which is a two year program. When students complete the highest secondary cycle and pass the proficiency examination they may enter the university for further study.³

It was adult and college students from the latter groups (secondary cycle, vocational school and university) who agreed to fill out the Reading Habits questionnaire. The purpose for the questionnaire was to gather data from Senegalese students about their reading habits. These data were examined. An examination of their reading habits is in this paper.

Subjects

A total of 59 male and female subjects participated in this study. Twenty-nine subjects identified themselves as male, 29 identified themselves as female; and one subject did not indicate his or her sex. All subjects were bilingual students who attended English education classes at the Centre Cultural Américain in Dakar, Senegal. They attended the classes to learn to speak the American version of English. Their educational levels were reported in the eight categories as follows: 11.9% attended secondary school; 13.6% completed secondary school; 1.7% attended vocational school; 28.8% completed vocational school; 15.3% attended college; 16.9% graduated from college; 3.4% enrolled in post graduate study; and 8.5% completed post graduate study. Students reported their ages within designed age groups. Forty-one percent were in the 16-25 age group; 51% were in the 26-35 age group; and 9% were in the 36-45 age group.

Marital status and student classifications of traditional (those students who were not employed) and non-traditional (those students who were employed) were used to group the subjects. Thirteen (22%) married subjects and 45 (76.3%) single subjects comprised one group. Twenty (33.9%) subjects classified as traditional and 39 (66.1%) subjects classified as non-traditional comprised the other group.

Assumptions

Since the educational system remains influenced heavily by the French model, and since a pursual of the literature yielded a general description of Senegal's educational opportunities, assumptions about the availability of reading materials were made. For example, it was assumed that students had access to public libraries in a manner similar to students in the USA.

Instrument

The Reading Habits instrument, written in English (see Appendix B) and French (see Appendix C), was a 15 item untimed questionnaire. Items on the questionnaire required a yes (positive)- no (negative) response. The items were grouped into categories. The categories described students' (a) satisfaction with reading ability, (b) types of materials read, (c) perceptions of reading efficiency, and (d) ease and availability of obtaining reading materials. Satisfaction with reading revealed their current reading status. Types of materials read included the reading of newspapers, religious, fiction and non-fiction materials. Reading efficiency included levels of competence in reading performance. Ease and availability of obtaining reading materials included both borrowing and purchasing. Additionally, sex, education, marital status, and occupational information were requested.

Procedures

1. Prior to going to Senegal, the researchers searched for literature that described the reading habits of Senegalese students. Also, contacted were professors at the University of Dakar, officials at the Senegalese Embassy in New York and Washington, and the UNESCO office in New York for information (1) about reading habits of Senegalese students, and (2) about locations where a representative population of students might be found that would participate in the study.
2. Meetings with the Peace Corp, UNESCO and American Embassy officials resulted in the researchers being referred to the director of the English Language Program at Centre Cultural Américain. That Program contained classes of students studying the American rather than the British version of English.

3. The Reading Habits instrument was administered to all 59 participants at the Centre Cultural Américain. A total of four classes were involved. Two daytime classes were taught by the same teacher and two evening classes were taught by two different teachers. Students from each of the four classes were receptive to the project and participated fully by filling out the questionnaire. Subsequently, they became engaged in conversations with the researchers concerning educational practices in the USA.

Limitations

The Reading Habits questionnaire was designed especially to obtain information from Senegalese students about their: satisfaction with reading ability, types of material read, perceptions of reading efficiency, and ease and availability of obtaining reading materials. Other instruments, designed primarily for use in the USA, were examined and considered inappropriate for this study.

Hypothesis I

There are no significant difference between married and single, and between traditional and non-traditional Senegalese students' response regarding their reading habits as described through satisfaction with reading, types of material read, reading efficiency and ease and availability of obtaining reading materials.

Analysis. The data were subjected to analysis by Chi-Square. That analysis revealed no statistical significant differences between married and single, and between traditional and non-traditional Senegalese students' responses regarding their reading habits; therefore, Hypothesis I was accepted.

Hypothesis II

No practical difference will be found in the Senegalese students' responses regarding their reading habits as described through satisfaction with reading, types of material read, reading efficiency, and ease and availability of obtaining reading materials.

Analysis. Data were examined by percentages. The researchers considered the data to be of practical difference when 3/4 of the students answered yes to an item. Students' responses were examined by groups: married and single (M and S), and traditional and non-traditional (T and N).

Satisfaction with Reading

M and S, and T and N. Items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 15 made up the "satisfaction with reading" category. Of the five items practical differences were reported for responses to items 2, 3, and 15 (See Table 1).

TABLE I

Satisfaction with Reading for M and S, and T and N

	M		S		T		N	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Item 2	100.0	0.0	95.6	4.2	94.7	5.3	97.4	2.6
Item 3	100.0	0.0	97.8	2.2	100.0	0.0	97.4	2.6
Item 15	100.0	0.0	78.3	21.7	85.0	15.0	82.1	17.0

Specifically, the groups reported that they would like to read better, that they enjoyed reading and that, if possible, they would take a reading course to improve their reading.

Types of Material Read

M and S, and T and N. Items 5, 6, 7 and 8 made up the category in "types of material read". Of the four items practical differences were reported for item 5 for both the M and S, and T and N groups. Items 7 and 8 revealed practical differences for the M and S groups (see Table !I).

TABLE II

Types of Material Read for M and S, and T and N

	M		S		T		N	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Item 5	76.9	23.1	87.0	13.0	90.0	10.0	82.1	17.9
Item 7	83.3	16.7	79.1	20.9	*		*	
Item 8	76.9	23.1	76.7	23.3	*		*	

*Indicates percentages under 75%.

The M and S, and T and N groups reported that they read newspapers often. Only the M and S groups reported that they enjoyed reading non-fiction and fiction materials.

Reading Efficiency

M and S, and T and N. Items 9, 10, 11 and 12 made up the "reading efficiency" category. Of the four items a practical difference was reported by the groups for item 11. For this item 100% of the married students and 86% of the single students, 95% of the traditional students and 86.8% of the non-traditional students reported remembering most of what they read within a reasonable period of time.

Ease and Availability of Obtaining Reading Materials

M and S, and T and N. Items 13 and 14 made up the "ease and availability of obtaining reading materials" category. Responses to both items for M and S, and T and N failed to show any strong preference to using the library to obtain materials, or to the purchasing of reading materials. Therefore, responses to both items failed to yield data of practical difference.

Summary and Discussion

The major findings of this study were:

1. There were no significant differences reported between married and single (M and S) and between traditional and non-traditional (T and N) Senegalese students' reading habits.
2. All groups reported that they would like to read better; that they enjoyed reading; that they read newspapers often; and, if possible, that they would take a course to improve their reading.
3. The married and single groups reported that they enjoyed reading fiction and non-fiction material.
4. All groups reported that they remembered most of what they read within a reasonable period of time.
5. No practical differences were found for either of the groups on ease and availability of obtaining reading materials.

It is interesting to note that both married and single, traditional and non-traditional Senegalese students enjoyed reading. They also expressed an overwhelming desire to improve their reading through participation in reading courses if such courses were available. Through informal discussions, large numbers of students expressed surprise and profound interest in the fact that American college and university curricula contained reading improvement courses.

The students suggested that courses of this type would probably not be available at the college/university level in Senegal. Reading improvement courses were perceived by them as belonging at an educational level equivalent to elementary school grades. However, a survey conducted by Mason, Myers and Callaway⁴ found that 64% of senior colleges and universities in the USA had reading improvement programs. This large percentage of programs indicated that large numbers of USA students take courses to improve their reading. Reasons reported by students for taking such reading courses were: to improve general reading skills and vocabulary; to succeed in other academic classes; to improve notetaking and studying skills and to increase proficiency in reading and speaking the English language.⁵ It seems then, that Senegalese students and American students both wish to take advantage of reading improvement courses for very similar reasons.

Under the category of "types of material read", no differences were found between traditional and non-traditional, and married and single students on frequency of reading newspapers. However, differences were noted between groups on reading other types of materials such as fiction and non-fiction. One possible explanation for this difference might be the ease with which one can obtain a newspaper as compared to obtaining other types of reading materials. It should be noted that the availability of reading materials for loan in Senegal in no way approaches the level of availability for loan in the USA.

For example, many libraries and other lending institutions in Senegal are supported by outside agencies such as the Centre Cultural Américain, Peace Corp and UNESCO.

It was not surprising to find most students reporting that they remembered most of what they read within a reasonable period of time since all students who participated in this study could be regarded as students who are advanced

academically. It can be assumed that students of lesser reading abilities would not have progressed this far given the requirements of passing proficiency examinations at various levels of schooling.

As a result of the findings, additional topics for further study were revealed. First, since the number of students used in the present study was 59, a replication of this study might use a much larger sample of adult and college-aged Senegalese students. Second, additional studies that examine the reading habits of adult and college Senegalese students in classes other than English education might be investigated. A third focus for the examination of reading habits could be according to Senegalese adults' occupations and/or economic status. Finally, a proposed study might examine the reading habits of Senegalese adults according to their number of years of schooling, and to their type of occupations. These proposed studies and others of a similar nature may be of significance for persons who develop instructional programs for international college students.

FOOTNOTES

¹The World Factbook. Produced by the Central Intelligence Agency, 1982, p. 206.

²Knowles, Asa S. (Ed.-in-Chief). The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education. Vol. 8, R-S. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977, pp. 3812-3818.

³Ibid.

⁴Mason, G. E., S. D. Myers, and B. Callaway. "Reading Improvement Programs in Senior Colleges and Universities." Reading World. 17, March 1978, pp. 184-189.

⁵Scales, A. M. "Students' Reported Reasons for Taking College Reading Courses", unpublished paper, 1983.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
DAKAR, SENEGAL, WEST AFRICA

Demographics

Senegal is a small country on the western coast of the African continent. Its total population as of July, 1982 was officially listed as 5,991,000 with an average growth rate of 2%. The major ethnic divisions among its peoples include 36% Wolof, 17.5% Fulani and 16.5% Serer. Primarily it is a Muslim country, some five percent of its religious adherents being Roman Catholic. While French (is the official language), however, the use of Wolof vernacular has spread to the extent that nearly 50% of the population speak it also. There are 1,732,000 in the labor force with 80% of these subsistence farm workers; only about 170,000 or 10% are actual earners. (Although more recent figures are not available, the drought which has been devastating the country the last few years has decreased these numbers drastically.) The government is a republic, loosely confederated with English-speaking The Gambia (Senegambia) which suggests an integration of the armed forces, economics, monetary systems and foreign policies. Abdou Diouf is the current president. Senegal having been a colony of France is termed a "Francophone" country, i.e.; its legal, governmental and educational systems are based on French models.

A Brief History

During the first half of the 19th century, Western education was introduced into Senegal, but it was only during the latter half of the century that any kind of an organized system was established. Its basis was laid by

Governor Louis Faidherbe who gained permission from the Freres de Ploermel to open several secondary courses for European children and those children of mixed ancestry in the colony. He also established a school known as the School of the Sons of Chiefs and Interpreters in Saint Louis to train children of African chiefs and notables as colonial administrations. Faidherbe later organized these schools into a state school system but permitted the system to be administered by religious orders. In 1901 the school system was secularized, and in 1903 it became part of the expanded system of the French West African federation.

The educational system of French West Africa was designed to serve two purposes: (1) the training of farmers, artisans, clerks, interpreters, and teachers who were needed to assist the French in operating the colony; and (2) the imposition of French culture upon the African peoples. This second purpose dominated educational policy throughout France's colonization; therefore, the organization, curriculum, content and instruction in Senegal came to mirror the educational system of metropolitan France.

At first, elementary schools (*écoles primaires élémentaires*) were divided into village schools which offered three year courses of reading, writing, (in French) and arithmetic and regional schools where the brightest students from the village schools completed their studies for the French certificate of elementary education (*certificat d' études primaires élémentaires*). After 1927 these schools were combined into a single type of primary school, the purpose to make the school system parallel that of France. In the rural schools the course content included agricultural training; the urban schools, however, followed the standard French curriculum.

The French model of secondary education was instituted in 1911 with the establishment of the William Ponty Normal School. It offered a three year course, having separate programs for training teachers and junior administrators for government and business positions. It was the only secondary school in French West Africa and was attended by students from all the French territories. It gained the reputation of being the only all-African secondary school that consistently maintained high academic standards, playing a significant part in the development of an educated African elite. The African School of Medicine was attached to the William Ponty institution in 1918, thus providing limited higher education to prepare Africans for local degrees in medicine, pharmacy and veterinary science.

Changes in colonial policy and political reforms after World War II influenced the creation of a twenty-year plan for education in Senegal. The mission was to broaden educational opportunities for the general population and give it the basic education necessary for survival in a Westernized society and to prepare the more gifted students for leadership roles locally. During the 1950's educational facilities were expanded, enrollments were greatly increased, and scholarships were provided for advanced study abroad. Thus, at Independence in 1960, Senegal gained a fully developed educational system producing a small number of highly qualified specialists and large numbers of students whose primary education made them literate but unable to find employment -- and whose instruction had all been taught in the French Language.

Current Status

Public education is free throughout elementary, secondary and higher levels of education. However, students must pass qualifying examinations to advance to the next higher level even though they may obtain a certificate indicating mastery of the curriculum at the preceding lower level. Private schools may also operate, but they must follow a governmentally approved curriculum in order to get government subsidies. When these students wish to transfer to public schools, they, too, must qualify through the standard entrance examinations.

Since its inception, higher education in Senegal has been geared to train specialists. By the time a student reaches the university level he/she has been thoroughly educated in general culture, and thus, enrolls in a field of particular study to follow a year-by-year prescribed curriculum: about 40% in humanities, letters, and the French language and civilization; law and economics having the next largest enrollment.

References:

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- DeGramont, Sanche. The French Portrait of a People. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1969.
- The World Fact Book. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983.

APPENDIX B READING HABITS

DIRECTIONS: Please check one.

1. Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐

AGE: 16-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐ 56-65 ☐ 66+ ☐

Attended elementary school ☐ Completed elementary school ☐

Attended secondary school ☐ Completed secondary school ☐

Attended vocational school ☐ Completed vocational school ☐

Attended college ☐ Graduated from college ☐

Enrolled in post graduate study ☐ Completed post graduate study ☐

2. Married ☐ Single ☐ Widowed ☐ Divorced ☐

3. Your occupation is _____

4. DIRECTIONS: Please circle Y for yes or circle N for no.

Y - N 1. Are you satisfied with the way you read now?

Y - N 2. Would you like to read better than you do now?

Y - N 3. Do you like to read?

Y - N 4. Are you too busy to read?

Y - N 5. Do you read a newspaper often?

Y - N 6. Do you read religious materials?

Y - N 7. Do you enjoy reading non-fiction such as diaries, essays and biographies?

Y - N 8. Do you enjoy reading works of fiction such as short stories, novels and poetry?

Y - N 9. Does your job require a lot of reading?

Y - N 10. Do you forget much of what you read quickly?

Y - N 11. Do you remember most of what you read in a reasonable period of time?

Y - N 12. Do you like to read to other people?

Y - N 13. Do you use the library to obtain reading materials?

Y - N 14. Do you buy most of your reading materials?

Y - N 15. If possible, would you take a reading course to improve your reading?

APPENDIX C
Habitudes de lire

INSTRUCTIONS: Désignez une réponse, s'il vous plaît.

1. Sexe: Masculin _____ Féminin _____
Âge: 16-25 _____ 26-35 _____ 36-45 _____ 46-55 _____ 56-65 _____ 66+ _____

Je suis:

- allé(e) à l'école primaire _____
allé(e) à l'école secondaire _____
allé(e) à l'école professionnelle _____
allé(e) au collège d'enseignement supérieur _____
inscrit(e) à des études post-graduées _____

J'ai:

- fini l'école primaire _____
fini l'école secondaire _____
fini l'école professionnelle _____
gradué du collège d'enseignement supérieur _____
fini mes études post-graduées _____

2. Marié(e) _____ Célibataire _____ Veuf/Veuve _____ Divorcé(e) _____

3. Mon occupation _____

4. INSTRUCTIONS: Encerclez O pour oui ou N pour non, s'il vous plaît.

- O - N 1. Êtes-vous satisfait(e) de votre présente façon de lire?
O - N 2. Voudriez-vous lire d'une façon meilleure qu'au présent?
O - N 3. Aimez-vous lire?
O - N 4. Êtes-vous trop occupé(e) pour lire?
O - N 5. Lisez-vous souvent des journaux?
O - N 6. Lisez-vous des matériaux religieux?
O - N 7. Aimez-vous lire de la littérature non-romanesque, telle que des journaux particuliers, des essais et des biographies?
O - N 8. Aimez-vous lire de la fiction, telle que des contes, des romans et de la poésie?
O - N 9. Votre profession exige-t-elle beaucoup de lecture?
O - N 10. Oubliez-vous beaucoup de ce que vous lisez vite?
O - N 11. Vous rappelez-vous la plupart de ce que vous lisez pendant quelque temps raisonnable?
O - N 12. Aimez-vous lire aux autres.
O - N 13. Utilisez-vous la bibliothèque pour obtenir de la lecture?
O - N 14. Achetez-vous la plupart de votre lecture?
O - N 15. Si possible, suivriez-vous un cours de lecture pour améliorer votre façon de lire?